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SCIENCE

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1917

THE CARNEGIE INSTITUTION AND THE PUBLIC¹

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RECIPROCITY OF RELATIONS

It is often openly asserted and more often tacitly assumed that an endowed altruistic organization acting under a state or a national charter may proceed without restrictions in the development of its work. Thus, in accordance with this view, the institution is frequently congratulated on its supposed freedom from governmental control and on its supposed immunity from social restraint. But this view is neither consonant with fact nor consistent with sound public policy. All such organizations are properly subject not only to the literal constraints of their charters but also to the commonly more narrow though unwritten limitations imposed by contemporary opinion. The ideal to be sought by them in any case consists in a reciprocity of relations between the individual endowment on the one hand and the vastly larger and more influential public on the other hand. This ideal, however, like most ideals, is rarely fully attainable. Its existence and importance are, indeed, almost as rarely recognized. Hence, any new altruistic organization is apt to find itself oscillating between two extreme dangers: the one arising from action on the part of the organization prejudicial to public interests; the other arising from public expectations impossible of attainment and therefore prejudicial to the organization.

Happily for the institution, neither of these extreme dangers has been seriously

¹ Extract from the Report of the President of the Carnegie Institution, Washington, D. C., 1917.